

El turns 13 by Justice_For_Benny

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Summary:

In an AU where Benny (and Barb!) is still alive, he opens his diner for El to throw her 13th birthday party. One-shot.

El turns 13

A year had passed since that fateful day on Maple Street last November. Three hundred and sixty-five days since Mike, Dustin and Lucas found the girl tattooed '011' in search of Will Byers.

A few weeks ago, after Mike's 14th birthday, the topic of El's came into discussion. She had never even heard of a 'birthday', let alone ever celebrated hers, so she was unsure of when it was. The five children were sitting in a booth at Benny's Burgers, accompanied by Joyce and Hopper. The diner was Hopper's favorite place to eat; they frequented the place at least twice a week.

"El, you have to have a party. A huge one, with cake and pizza and candy – and don't forget the pudding! It's your favorite!" Dustin insisted.

"That's *your* favorite, Dustin. El's favorite desert is strawberry ice cream." Mike smiled at El.

"Don't let him walk all over you, El. We'll have whatever you want at your birthday party." Lucas- who had taken the longest to warm up to El – was now one of her fiercest protectors.

"Ok, how about we take it step by step?" Having dealt with anxiety most of her life, Joyce could always tell when things became a little overwhelming for El. In those times, she always tried her best to help. She placed an arm around her shoulders. "First, we have to pick a date." El nodded, smiling up to the closest thing she had to a mother.

"I know!" Dustin boomed. He paused for dramatic effect.

"Well??" Will indulged him; Will *always* indulged him.

"What about November 11th? You know... 11/11? You know, cause *Eleven*." He was met with several eye rolls as he laughed at his cheesy joke.

"Ok, now that that's been said, let's pick a real date. It has to be

something that's important to El..." Mike trailed off, thinking of all the important moments in the last year. There was her first dance, the Snowball... Her first day of school... The day Hopper adopted her... The day she defeated the-

"How about this..." Joyce interrupted his thoughts that were quickly turning dark. "We all celebrate the day we came into the world, right? Well, what if we celebrate El's birthday on the day she came into *our* world?"

"That's perfect!" Although Will didn't know what day it was exactly, he knew it was during the week he spent in that *place*. He would love to spend that time of year celebrating El, rather than remembering the worst time of his life; he didn't just welcome the distraction, he needed it. El nodded in agreement.

"Great! So, it's settled; that was, what, November... 12th- "

"-7th" Dustin's mouth went dry as he realized his mistake. The boys shared a look.

"What was that?" When no one answered him, Hopper pulled out the 'cop voice.' "Boys..."

Lucas, always one to save himself trouble, confessed. "It wasn't the 12th, it was the 7th. We found her when we went looking for Will; Wheeler kept her in his basement."

A small smile formed on El's mouth as she remembered two things: one – how kind Mike was to her during those difficult days, and two – the first time she'd ever eaten eggos. Her smile dissipated as she heard Hopper transition to his 'Dad voice.'

"You *what*? I thought I told you boys to leave it to me? Do you know how stupid that was? You have no idea how dangerous those people looking for El were. Do you have any idea what could have happened to you kids?"

"Dad." El placed a hand on his arm. Both her vocabulary and her confidence had grown immensely in the last year. She met her adoptive father's gaze with a look that said 'drop it.'

“El is right,” he conceded. “It’s in the past.” He gave her a smile and ruffled her curls (which had also grown in the last year), taking a swig of his beer.

“Great! Now we know when. Next step is deciding what we’re going to do.” Joyce’s excitement was growing; it always did at the prospect of making her children happy, and she considered El one of her own.

El considered her options while they ate their food that had arrived. Honestly, she wasn’t entirely sure of what people did for their birthdays. All the boys did on theirs was go to each other’s houses and eat loads of food. How was that different from every other weekend? She thought of all the places they could go – the arcade, the drive-in theater, maybe down to the lake. No, the lake was much too cold in November... She continued in circles as the boys demolished their food. She was finishing off her fries when she finally gave up. Part of her wished she could just have it here; she came here every weekend already, why not have party here? She wasn’t sure if that was something Benny would allow, though.

And just like that, as if hearing her thoughts, Benny came walking out of the kitchen. He never let the Hopper’s leave without stopping by their booth. El slid under the table and crawled out to greet him. It was much faster than waiting for the boys to slide out of her way.

“How’s my favorite little thief?” Benny bellowed, wrapping her in a tight hug. “Have you grown since I last saw you? I swear you’re an inch taller.”

El giggled. “That was three days ago, Benny.”

“Three days? Well I’ll be damned, it feels like it’s been weeks to me! Well anyways, what are y’all up to this fine Saturday?”

“We’re talking about my birthday.” She beamed.

Hopper’s smiled matched his daughter’s. The food was only half the reason he spent so many nights at the diner; the other half was to see Benny. He was El’s first friend, and she lit up whenever she saw him. Nights like this made his heart (and stomach) content.

“Your birthday’s comin’ up? That’s awesome, kiddo. What are your plans?”

“I... don’t know yet.” She confessed.

Benny paused, rubbing his beard. “Have it here.” He suggested.

El’s brilliant smile grew impossibly wider. “Could I?”

“Are you kidding me? It would be an honor to host El Hopper’s birthday my diner.”

El turned to Hopper with a hopeful question in her eyes. “Can we?”

Unable to deny her anything, he felt his smile grow to match hers. “Anything for my girl. How much to rent the place out?”

“Nonsense. It’s on the house. Anything for my dear friend; consider it a birthday gift.

“Thank you!” She wrapped her small arms around his belly, burying her head into his side. “You’re a good friend, Benny.”

“Don’t make me blush.” He joked. “You’re a good friend to have, El.

That was weeks ago. Today was the big day. The diner was filled with decorations, presents, and people she loved. The Byer family, the Wheeler’s, Dustin, Lucas, Steve, Barb... even her new friend Max. Streamers lined the tables, wrapping paper littered the floor, plates with remnants of ice cream cake surrounded her.

Counting the booths down to her favorite booth, her booth, she took a seat and admired the scene before her. The adults were watching over the children, talking about whatever it was adults talked about. The older kids were gathered around the punch bowl, giggling conspicuously. Her closest friends were fighting over who was next up to bat in attempts to destroy the impossible difficult piñata. She looked around, making sure no one was paying attention to the piñata itself; once she was in the clear, she locked eyes with Mike, flashing a mischievous smile. Tilting her head ever so slightly forward, she burst the piñata open, causing the candy to drop to the ground. Mike laughed as the pieces of paper found their way into his hair.

If this is what a birthday was, she was glad to finally have one.

Author's Note:

Thank you reading my first official one shot on here!
I would love any reviews, they give me confidence.
Thank you to the anon who put this in my head.